

James Y. Davis' Sons Co. Building
1201 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-312

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DC,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

JAMES Y. DAVIS' SONS BUILDING

- Location: 1201-1204 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW and 406, 408 Twelfth Street, NW (Northwest corner of Twelfth St. and Pennsylvania Avenue), Washington, District of Columbia.
- USGS: Washington West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.1324080.4306890.
- Present Owner: Cabot, Cabot and Forbes Co.
60 State Street
Boston, Massachusetts
- Present Occupants: Washington Wine and Liquor Co. and Mike's NY Deli.
- Present Use: Retail stores; 406 1/2 12th Street, NW and 2nd floor vacant; to be demolished, 1979.
- Significance: This brick commercial building was designed by a local architect in the late nineteenth century. In spite of twentieth century alterations, the irregular shape, use of ornamental terra cotta, projecting bays, and side tower, make the building a distinctive example of Queen Anne commercial architecture in Washington.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: 1886. Building Permit Application No. 10, dated July 1, 1886 shows that "owner" (actually lessee) James Y. Davis' Sons obtained a permit to construct a 2 story + cellar brick building on part of lot 1 (lot 800) in Square 291.
2. Architect: William M. Poindexter was born and educated in Richmond, Virginia before the Civil War. He started as a draftsman in the Office of the US Supervising Architect in Washington, DC in 1868 and designed several marine hospitals. In 1878 he established an office in Washington, DC where his active career continued until 1906. He died on December 20, 1908. Among his important buildings are the State Library, Richmond, Virginia, the main hospital building and later additions to the Soldiers' Home, Washington, DC, and the Columbian University Building on the corner of 15th and H Streets in 1883. He also designed the 3 story stone and brick Episcopal Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital at 1147-49 15th Street, Washington, DC at a cost of 70,000 in 1903. Before designing the commercial building at 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue for James Y. Davis' Sons, William Poindexter had, in

1894, designed a \$14,000 home for James S. Davis at 1333 Roanoke Street, Washington, DC. The 1890 City Directory lists William M. Poindexter, architect, office: 1505 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, home: 1837 M Street, NW, Washington, DC.

3. Original and subsequent owners: District of Columbia General Assessment of Real Property records list Philip D. Reily as the owner on the 1889-1890 assessments. In 1885 Philip K. Reily et al. leased the 1201 property to Davis and Davis (recorded 1885, liber 1,169, folio 178). City Directories for 1889 and 1890 show Philip K. Reily resident at 103 C Street, SE, with his occupation given as reporter and stenographer. In 1901 Philip K. Reily et al. leased to James S. Davis et al. property described as follows: "all of lot 1 in Square 291, SE corner NW along Pennsylvania Avenue 34.08' to center of gable wall; NW at angle through center of said gable wall of main house 55.73' to where back building joins main gable wall. NE through gable wall of rear or back building 56.26' to S. line of an alley 10' wide, E. along said alley 12.83' until it intersects with line of 12th Street, then 120.17' to beginning." (recorded April 8, 1901, liber 2572, folio 82, inst. 24).

On January 20, 1913 building Permit No. 3,371 lists Mary K. von Ringharz and A.O.S. Reily as owners, but by October 4, 1913, Building Permit No. 1,558 gives the owner as Lem Towers, Jr. This change in ownership is confirmed by deed 3601-488 recorded April 10, 1913 by which Mary K. von Ringharz et vir. et al. transferred part of lot 1, Square 291 to Lem Towers. In the 1914 Polk's Washington City Directory Lem Towers, Jr. is listed as residing at 1440 Belmont Street, NW and having a General Insurance and Loans Business at 1421 F Street, NW. The General Assessment Records also show Lem Towers, Jr. as the owner in 1914-1915 and continue to list him as the owner until 1928, when the property is assessed to Lem J. Towers and Annie B. Towers.

In 1930 Lem J. and Annie B. Towers deeded to Ernest Unger (deed 6407-507, recorded January 2, 1930). Ernest Unger et ux. then deeded to Christian Heurich in 1931 (deed 6532-386, recorded March 3, 1931). For 1935-1936 Amelia L. Heurich is listed as the owner in the Tax Assessment Records, and her ownership is confirmed by a lease (see Section D: Occupants). In 1936 Amelia L. Heurich deeded the property back to Christian Heurich (deed 7065-337, recorded December 31, 1936). Under the will of Christian Heurich this property, along with all other property owned by Christian Heurich at death in the District of Columbia and not previously transferred, was granted in fee simple to

Christian Heurich Jr., Anita Heurich Eckles, and Karla Heurich King, (recorded May 13, 1965, liber 12,410, folio 116, inst. 16,198).

4. Builder: George F. Dearing.
5. Original plans and construction: Photographs from circa 1900-1910 reveal that an octagonal bay with an attached exterior stairway once projected the full height of the building where the northernmost bay window now exists on the 12th Street facade. Close examination of the two second floor window arches in this area reveals dissimilarities in the workmanship of their construction when compared to the four neighboring arches, and confirms their non-contemporary nature. It is not known when in the Twentieth Century the bay was removed. The original Application for Permit to Build, dated July 1, 1886, contains a plan which details the original storefront construction along Pennsylvania Avenue and the 12th Street facade.
6. Alterations and additions: Both facades were altered for the first time as detailed on a plan contained in an Application for Permit to Repair or Reconstruct Buildings, dated January 20, 1913. The alterations were concerned exclusively with the storefronts on both street facades. On the Pennsylvania Avenue facade, the single center entry was removed and replaced by two entries located directly beneath the two narrowest transom windows. A new partition was also built down the middle of the ground floor space to create two distinct retail stores, each of which would now have its own main entry door. On the 12th Street facade, the show case at the corner was extended and a new unit was constructed abutting the stairs of the projecting octagonal bay. Further along the 12th Street facade, the storefront beneath the brick arches was altered. The existing cast iron columns were cased-in and new sheets of storefront and transom glass were installed. The rebuilt storefront at the corner was also extended to abut the north side of the projecting octagonal bay on 12th Street. The two storefront sections at the northern end of the 12th Street facade have also undergone change, but the chronology is not yet clear. All elements of the structure remain on their original sites. The architect for the 1913 alterations was A. B. Mullett and Co., of which Thomas A. Mullett and Frederick M. Mullett (sons of prominent Washington architect Alfred B. Mullet), were the principals.

The following is a list of permits to repair and alter the building:

1. In 1913 owners Mary K. von Ringharz and A.O.S. Reily obtained a permit "to remove present show windows and replace with new ones as per plans on file, build stud partition on 1st floor and minor repairs...cover over present area on 12th Street". The estimated cost of these major alterations was \$3,000.00. (Building Permit No. 3,371 dated January 20, 1913).
2. In 1913 (Permit No. 3,433, dated January 24, 1913) James Y. Davis' Sons requested permission "to erect a tightboard fence not less than 7' in height along the curb line and enclosing the sidewalk in front of premises at 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue". The fence may have been erected around the construction site as a safety precaution.
3. On February 24, 1913 Permit No. 3,928 was issued by the District of Columbia Engineer Department "to reinforce show windows" having a 3'-0" projection at 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue.
4. Later in 1913 new owner Lem Towers, Jr. obtained a permit "to change shop windows on 12th Street and put in plate glass, increase width of projections to 4'-0" and lay floor in show windows and inside panels work". Since the same architect, the A.B. Mullett Co., and the same contractor, W. K. Reeve, who had been working in January, were used once again, the work on this permit may represent an extension and modification of the remodeling begun under the January permit; additional plans were not provided (Building Permit No. 1,558 dated October 4, 1913).
5. Building Permit No. 7,792 dated April 29, 1922 supplied the following information:
 - Owner: Lem Towers
 - Architect: L. E. Denslow
 - Contractor: United Cigar Stores Co.
 - How Occupied: Stores
 - Description of work: "changes in structural work and front to display windows, also entrances to stores and partitions inside; plumbing plans to be submitted later."
(referenced plans have been destroyed)
6. In 1922 the United Cigar Stores Co. obtained permission to put up a 4' x 8' sign made of oil and cloth and reading "Butterfly Hosiery Shop/For Ladies and Gents," at address 1201 1/2.

This is the first reference to 1201 1/2 and may reflect the remodeling done by the United Cigar Stores Co. earlier in the year, although the 1913 plans do show two doorways on the Pennsylvania Avenue elevation and the beginning of an interior partition just east of the western door on the projection plan. (Building Permit No. 4,160 dated October 25, 1922).

7. Permit No. 8,175 dated March 1923 permits "owner" Justin Liebman to install "one canvas and roller awning raised and lowered by straps" which is to be mounted 8' above the sidewalk.
8. Building Permit No. 121,223 dated February 28, 1929, for address 404 12th Street, applied as follows: "We request permission to make a small stand inside of building to review parade on March 8, 1929." The parade in question was Herbert Hoover's Inaugural Parade, and this permit reflects a use common to all three of the Pennsylvania Avenue buildings in Square 291.
9. In 1932 applicant M. A. Corson requested a permit to install one class D refrigeration system for a delicatessen at 402 12th Street (Building Permit No. 150,453, dated February 15, 1932).
10. Repair Permit No. 172,190 dated June 14, 1934 shows that Miss B. Walker requested permission to cut a 4' x 6' opening in a brick wall at 404 12th Street (see Section D: Occupants).
11. In Repair Permit No. 177,803 application dated February 28, 1935 the United Cigar Stores Co. requested permission to make minor interior repairs to lot 800, Square 291 and stated that the architect would be E. Weber, NY and that the premises were occupied by stores and offices. But in a letter dated April 23, 1935 the Fine Arts Commission, which had been given jurisdiction over commercial building on the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue by Act of Congress approved May 16, 1930, opposed the planned projections over the building line. The records do not indicate how the matter was resolved.
12. Later in 1935 the United Cigar Stores Co. obtained a permit (No. 180,224 dated May 10, 1935) to "remove present dividing partition, cut opening for new door, add stairs to basement, relocated entrance to store." The architect was again E. Weber and this time "how occupied" listed "stores and loft."
13. One month later (Permit No. 181,435 dated June 15, 1935) owner Amelia Heurich requested permission "to erect two canvas covered patent gear awnings 8'-0" above the sidewalk" and listed the occupant as "drug store."

14. At almost the same time (Permit No. 181,521 dated June 18, 1935) the Whelan Drug Co. applied for a permit to install a class D refrigeration system with the compressor in the basement.
 15. In 1940 owner Christian Heurich obtained a Repair Permit (No. 230,250 dated March 8, 1940) to "repair base of show window, renew joists and flooring" at 406 1/2 12th Street at a cost of \$50.00 and listed the occupant as a tailor shop.
- B. Historical events and persons connected with the Structure:

The building was constructed for the James Y. Davis' Sons Co. (James S. Davis et al.), which was listed as a hat business in 1889 and as a men's furnishings store in 1914. The company continued to occupy 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue until the early 1920's, leasing it in 1901, in 1908, when Philip K. Reily et al. leased land and premises at 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue to James S. Davis et al. for 10 years starting April 1, 1907 (recorded August 11, 1908 liber 3,167, folio 309, inst. 45), and for the last time in 1921, when Lem Towers, Jr. leased 1201 "except that part now used as a shoe shine parlor" to James Y. Davis' Sons, Inc. for 10 years starting April 1, 1920 (recorded March 17, 1921, liber 4,511, folio 217, inst. 122).

In 1912 Samuel T. Davis Jr. leased space at 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue for 8 years 5 month commencing January 1, 1912 to John W. Dunbar et al. (recorded October 30, 1912, lease 3568-395). In the next instrument recorded, John W. Dunbar sublet the space to Lem Towers Jr. for the same term ending on March 31, 1921. The 1914 City Directory lists Dunbar & Co., cigars; other 1914 occupants were J. Donald Britt, Edward H. Dick, hotel agent, and Wilbur E. Evans, dentist.

In a series of leases starting in 1908 and ending in 1926, Alexis Toggas sublet space at 408 (now possibly 406 1/2?) for what may have been a "shoe shine parlor." ((1) lease 3159-33, recorded May 25, 1908; (2) lease 3973-475, recorded June 26, 1914; H. R. Howenstein to Alexis Toggas; and (3) lease 4415-26, recorded August 3, 1920, Lem Towers Jr. to Alexis Toggas for a term ending March 31, 1926).

Apparently, the James Y. Davis' Sons Co. did not complete their 1921 lease because in 1922 Lem Towers Jr. leased 1201 to the United Cigar Stores Co. for 8 years starting April 1, 1922 (lease 4735-97, recorded May 17, 1922). According to the City Directories the United Cigar Stores Co. then sublet the space to Hilton's Clothing in 1924 and to Ellis M. Herman, men's clothing in 1924 and 1928 and to Samuel Saidman, Men's Furnishings 1924-1928.

With the onset of the depression the property is listed as vacant from 1929-1931. Colonial Stages was a tenant in 1931 and 1932, but City Directories show the 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue property was again vacant in 1933, although Building Permit Records indicate a delicatessen was operating at 402 12th Street.

In 1933 William and Gertrude Gildenhorn who had been running the Capitol Men's Shop at 1203 Pennsylvania Avenue moved next door to 1201 1/2, while in 1934 the Raleigh Gift Shop moved into 1201. Both enterprises continued in business at the 1201 building until 1935.

A 1934 Repair Permit shows a Miss B. Walker at 404 12th Street. Since this is the address for the entrance to the 2nd floor of 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, Miss Walker may be the first of several tenants who used the 2nd floor for dance classes and a dance studio. In an interview Mr. Washabaugh, Manager of the Washington Garage Co., which has leased 1201 for a number of years, and Mr. Sherwood, who has been with Washington Wine and Liquor for 45 years, both at 1211 Pennsylvania Avenue and in the 1201 building, recalled the use of the 2nd floor as a dance studio. There is evidence that a practice bar was installed in one wall. Mr. Sherwood believed that an Arthur Murray branch occupied the space in the 1930's and 1940's, that a local country and western personality, Mr. Connie B. Gay, used the space next and that the Lynn Welters dance studio occupied the 2nd floor for around 10 years until ca. 1975. Some confirmation for such occupancy is furnished by trust chattels given by Daniel Albert to Smith and Ross, Tr. for 404 12th Street. ("Upstairs Dance Studio)" with leasehold interest (recorded April 29, 1952, liber 9, 703, folio 175).

In 1935 (lease 6917-407, recorded August 22, 1935) Amelia L. Heurich leases 1201 and 1201 1/2 Pennsylvania Avenue to the United Cigar Stores Co., Inc. of Maryland from March 1, 1935 until February 29, 1940. United Cigar Stores and Whelan Drug Co. repaired and improved 1201 Pennsylvania in 1935 and operated a combined drug store, cigar store and probably a soda fountain (see refrigeration permit). The United Cigar Store-Whelan tenancy continued until the late 1940's when the present occupant, Washington Wine and Liquors, moved into 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue from its old quarters at 1211 Pennsylvania Avenue. The other current occupant, Mike's NY Deli moved into 406 12th Street, NW in the early 1970's.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:
District of Columbia General Assessment Records, in D.C. public library.
Interviews with tenants and neighboring tenants, Summer 1979.
Land Records, District of Columbia.

Record Group 351, National Archives: District of Columbia Building Permit Records 1877-1949.
2. Secondary and published sources:

Polk's Washington City Directory, 1890.

Obituary, AIA Quarterly Bulletin, January 1909.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Whithey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects. Los Angeles: New Age Publishing, 1956.

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Boston, Massachusetts
for the
Pennsylvania Avenue
Development Corporation
Summer 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement: This irregularly shaped brick structure is ornamented in the Queen Anne style prevalent in the late nineteenth century. It consists of a dominant building on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 12th street and a series of subordinate adjoining buildings extending along 12th Street.
- B. Description of Exterior:
 1. Overall dimensions: The structure measures approximately thirty-four feet in width and one hundred twenty feet in length. The height of the Pennsylvania Avenue facade, measured from the sidewalk to the top of the corner tower, is approximately forty-six feet. It is two stories.
 2. Foundations: According to the Application for Permit to Build, the original brick foundation was specified to be 13" thick.

3. Wall construction: The exterior and party walls are load-bearing masonry walls. The exterior walls are three brick headers thick while the party walls are two brick headers thick. The street elevations are faced with red pressed brick laid with a red lime mortar. The three widths of the street elevations are bonded to each other by header courses spaced every seventh to ninth course (common bond).

Both facades have masonry arches in their second floor windows and also in the attic windows of the corner tower. A shallow blind arch on the Pennsylvania Avenue facade contains all of the second floor windows and the ground floor storefront within its limits. The infill between the intrados of the blind arch and the extrados of the second floor window arches is composed of decorative terra cotta blocks set in an alternating pattern. Three unusual brick shapes are used in the immediate vicinity of the corner tower: the small projection beneath the second floor window of the corner tower contains brick with obtuse corners, the chimney corners contain brick with chamfered corners and the tower contains brick with curved faces.

4. Structural system, framing: The floor and roof framing of 1201 Pennsylvania Avenue typically runs from east to west, bearing on the 12th Street facade to the east and running perpendicularly to the party wall on the west. Due to the irregular plan of the building, the framing nearest the Pennsylvania Avenue facade intersects this facade at an acute angle and bears on that wall instead of the party wall. The attic floor framing at this point, for example, bears on the projecting extrados of the blind arch. The two exceptions to the direction of the floor and roof framing are the north and south slopes of the main structure. At these areas, hip rafters are utilized to pick-up roof rafters which slope south towards the Pennsylvania Avenue facade and north towards the attached subordinate structures. The wood framing for the tower roof and rear wall does not extend below the level of the attic floor. All vertical studs and posts of the framing are nailed into the floor boards of the attic floor.
5. Storefronts and canopy: The existing canopy and storefront which wraps around both facades of the main building is the result of many alterations over the years. The original construction produced a storefront composed of two projecting showcases on either side of a centrally located single entrance on the Pennsylvania Avenue facade. The easternmost showcase continued around the corner and stopped at the metal clad pier which is approximately one foot south of the chimney. In 1913, the original storefront was greatly

altered by closing the original entrance and installing two new entrances beneath each of the narrowest transom windows on the Pennsylvania Avenue facade. The present canopy most probably was added at this time, although it ran no further than three to four feet beyond the northernmost transom window of the 12th Street facade, where it would have abutted the exterior stairway. The present storefront appears to date from 1935, when recorded repairs were made to relocate an entrance door (probably to the present corner location) and cut a new door opening (probably the western door on the Pennsylvania Avenue facade). Additional repairs to the storefront undoubtedly were made circa 1950, when the liquor store began its occupancy. At this date the projecting octagonal bay may have been removed, along with the attached exterior stairway, with the storefront along 12th Street being extended to its present length.

6. Chimneys: The single chimney serving the main building is located alongside the corner tower on the 12th Street facade. Two chimneys exist on the subordinate structures to the north of the main building; both are located in the west party wall.
7. Doorway openings: None of the existing doorways to the main building were in use at the time of the building's initial occupancy, except perhaps for the northernmost door on the 12th Street facade, which was within the now removed projecting octagonal bay. The present doorway at the corner dates from no earlier than 1935, as does the doorway at the west end of the Pennsylvania Avenue facade.
8. Window openings: Windows on the first floor of the main building are limited to a total of four roughly square transom windows above the canopy on the Pennsylvania Avenue facade and two roughly square transom windows above the canopy on the 12th Street facade. The second floor windows have four course round brick arches with the exception of the second floor tower window, which has a five-course arch. The three projecting bay windows on the second floor have resulted in the loss of at least four complete window sash units. A photograph from 1930 reveals that the bay window on the Pennsylvania Avenue facade was in place by that date. The southernmost bay window on the 12th Street elevation probably dates from the same period, but the northernmost bay window on this elevation was added only after the projecting octagonal bay at that location had been removed, circa 1950.

9. Roof shape and materials: Due to the irregular plan of the site, the roof of the main building is a modified double-pitched hipped roof. The roofing material is either tin or terne-plated iron installed with a standing seam. The same material is used on the shed roofs of the subordinate buildings along 12th Street. The corner tower has a conical roof covered with clay tile shingles cut in a fish-scale pattern. Clay tile shingles with square-cut tabs are used on the rear wall of the tower. An eye-brow roof ventilator exists at approximately the mid-point of 12th Street facade of the main building.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor of the main building is a single open space, with access provided at the southeast corner and at the northeast corner. The remainder of the first floor area of the main building and the subordinate buildings is given over to small commercial spaces. The second floor of the main building is also a single open space, but unlike the first floor space, it flows unimpeded by wall partitions into the second floor spaces of the subordinate buildings. These spaces appear to have been part of a single large office or studio.
2. Stairway: One stairway, located within the southernmost octagonal bay of the 12th Street elevation serves all of the second floor spaces. The construction of the stairway suggests a circa 1950 building date, contemporary with the removal of the original octagonal stair tower.
3. Flooring: The flooring throughout the various sections of the structure is hard wood flooring covered with asphalt sheet or tiles.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: All wall and ceiling surfaces are finished with plaster, except in the first floor space of the main building, where a pressed metal ceiling and cornice is utilized.

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Boston, Massachusetts
for the
Pennsylvania Avenue
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Summer 1979

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the demolition of buildings in Square 291. John A. Burns, AIA, was the HABS project coordinator. The historical information was prepared by Bill Noble of Cabot, Cabot and Forbes for PADC, and the architectural description was prepared by John Hecker of David McLaren Hart and Associates for PADC. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal by Emily J. Harris, an architectural historian in the HABS office in October, 1979. Photographs were taken by Barry Brooks in April 1979.